

Message Text

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PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-12 AID-05 PC-01
HA-05 TRSE-00 /127 W
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R 311906Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7441
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
USINT HAVANA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 09800

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR ET SU UR EG
SUBJECT: GOE VIEW OF ERITREAN SITUATION

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1399

1. SUMMARY. GOE OFFICIAL BELIEVES NEITHER EPMG NOR
SOVIETS HAVE DECIDED HOW TO HANDLE ERITREAN INSURGENCY.
PMAC APPARENTLY SPLIT BETWEEN FACTION APPREHENSIVE OF
COST MILITARY SOLUTION AND FACTION PUSHING FOR FINAL
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MILITARY ERADICATION WITH EXTENSIVE SOVIET AND CUBAN
SUPPORT. SOVIETS WANT CREDIT FOR ANY SOLUTION AND THUS
DO NOT FAVOR SUDANESE ROLE IN NEGOTIATIONS, BUT MOSCOW
HESITATING OVER BOTH DEGREE OF SOVIET/CUBAN INVOLVE-
MENT AND POSSIBLE SOVIET MEDIATION. EGYPTIANS BELIEVE
SPEEDY SOLUTION NECESSARY TO AVOID CONFLICT SPREADING
INTO SUDAN AND THAT UNGA RESOLUTION 390 OF 1950 COULD

SERVE AS BASIS FOR SETTLEMENT. GOE THUS ADOPTING POSITION THAT ERITREAN INDEPENDENCE OUT OF QUESTION AND CALLING FOR BOTH SIDES TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS. GOE CONSIDERS ERITREANS ABLE TO WITHSTAND AT LEAST INITIAL PHASES OF ALL-OUT ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE, PARTICULARLY IF SOVIET/CUBAN TROOPS/ADVISORS NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED. USG ROLE ON ERITREA SHOULD BE TO INSIST TO MOSCOW THAT ETHIOPIANS ENTER NEGOTIATIONS IMMEDIATELY. FAILING THIS, GOE BELIEVES ERITREAN MILITARY STRENGTH AND SOVIET DISINCLINATION TO SEE WAR COME TO SPEEDY SOLUTION WOULD RESULT IN PROTRACTED WAR WITH SOVIETS ONLY WINNERS. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING MEETING WITH EMBOFFS MARCH 30, MFA AFRICAN DEPT DIRECTOR AMB AHMAD SIDQI STATED THAT GOE BELIEVES ETHIOPIAN PMAC CURRENTLY SPLIT BETWEEN TWO FACTIONS OVER HOW TO PROCEED WITH ERITREAN INSURGENCY. MODERATE FACTION, WHICH GOE BELIEVES INCLUDES MENGISTU, SERIOUSLY WORRIED OVER FINANCIAL AND HUMAN COSTS OF SUBDUING HEAVILY-ARMED AND WELL-ORGANIZED ERITREANS. THIS FACTION FEARS NOT ONLY THAT PROTRACTED STRUGGLE WILL PUT SOVIETS MORE FIRMLY IN CONTROL, BUT ALSO THAT DIFFICULT MILITARY CAMPAIGN, EVEN WITH NEW SOVIET EQUIPMENT, MIGHT ERODE FUTURE MILITARY SUPPORT FOR EPMG.

3. HARD-LINE FACTION, FLUSHED WITH RECENT SUCCESS IN
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OGADEN, PUSHING FOR ALL-OUT VICTORY IN ERITREA, BACKED IF NECESSARY BY MASSIVE INVOLVEMENT OF CUBAN TROOPS AND SOVIET ADVISORS. THIS FACTION POINTS TO ERITREAN REVERSES AT MASSAWA AS SIGNALLING VULNERABILITY OF INSURGENTS; WHILE MODERATE FACTION POINTS TO UNSUCCESSFUL EPMG ATTEMPT TO CLEAR ASMARA-MASSAWA ROAD (IN WHICH "APPROXIMATELY 60 CUBAN CASUALTIES SUSTAINED") AS INDICATION THAT QUICK MILITARY SOLUTION ELUSIVE. PMAC HAS NOT YET MADE DECISION ON HOW TO PROCEED, ALTHOUGH CONSIDERABLE DEPLOYMENTS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO ERITREA NOW UNDER WAY. GOE ALSO HAS INFORMATION THAT EPMG PLANNING TO REPLACE DEMORALIZED SECOND DIVISION WITH CRACK UNITS.

4. SOVIET VIEWS. IN GOE THINKING, MAIN SOVIET CONCERN IS HOW TO EXTEND DIRECT SOVIET INFLUENCE OVER LONGEST PERIOD POSSIBLE. MOSCOW WOULD THUS NOT PARTICULARLY FAVOR MASSIVE CUBAN INVOLVEMENT TO CRUSH ERITREANS, IF THIS WERE TO BRING SPEEDY CONCLUSION. SOVIETS SIMILARLY DO NOT FAVOR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT ASSISTED BY SUDAN, CONTEMPLATED BY PMAC MODERATES, AS MOSCOW WOULD GET LITTLE CREDIT FOR SETTLEMENT. GOE BELIEVES THAT, IF

PMAC OPTS FOR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, SOVIETS WILL ADVOCATE INITIAL HARD MILITARY STRIKE AT ERITREANS, FOLLOWED BY NEGOTIATIONS UNDER SOVIET AUSPICES, PROBABLY CONDUCTED BY GDR, WHICH HAS BEEN ACTIVE WITH ERITREAN INSURGENTS IN PAST. IF EPMG OPTS FOR ALL-OUT MILITARY SOLUTION, SOVIETS WOULD LIKE TO SEE ETHIOPIANS WIN, BUT SLOWLY, AND THIS WILL DETERMINE DEGREE OF SOVIET/CUBAN INVOLVEMENT ON GROUND. GOE HAS HEARD THAT MENGISTU, OR AT LEAST VERY SENIOR EPMG DELEGATION, CURRENTLY IN MOSCOW TO BRING SOVIET-ETHIOPIAN VIEWS INTO ALIGNMENT BEFORE DECISION MADE ON HOW TO PROCEED. (COMMENT: SOVIET EMBASSY COUNSELOR, IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION BY POLCOUNS

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AS TO HOW LONG SOVIETS INTENDED TO STAY SO MASSIVELY INVOLVED IN ETHIOPIA, REPLIED SOVIETS INTEND TO STAY IN ETHIOPIA AS LONG AS U.S. REMAINS IN SAUDI ARABIA. IF GOE HAS ALSO HEARD SUCH COMMENTS, EGYPTIAN

CONCLUSIONS ARE UNDERSTANDABLE.)

5. GOE POSITION. SIDQI BELIEVES INDEPENDENCE FOR ERITREA IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES ABSOLUTELY OUT OF QUESTION AND GOE URGING ERITREAN GUERRILLA GROUPS TO DESIST FROM SUCH DEMANDS. GOE DOES NOT BELIEVE, HOWEVER,
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THAT EPMG MAY 1976 NINE-POINT AUTONOMY PLAN CONSTITUTES SUITABLE BASIS FOR NEGOTIATIONS, EVEN THOUGH ETHIOPIANS CURRENTLY INSISTING THAT ANY NEGOTIATIONS MUST BE ON THIS BASIS. GOE FAVORS UNGA RES 390 OF 1950, AT LEAST AS STARTING POINT FOR ETHIOPIAN-ERITREAN TALKS, ALTHOUGH OFFICIAL EGYPTIAN POSITION IS THAT BOTH SIDES SHOULD MEET WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS. SIDQI OPINED THAT, SHOULD EPMG DROP INSISTENCE ON NINE-POINT PROGRAM, ERITREANS WILL SHELVE INSISTENCE ON EVENTUAL INDEPENDENCE. MARCH 23 ELF-EPLF UNITY DECLARATION IN , KHARTOUM, EFFECTED UNDER CONSIDERABLE SUDANESE PRESSURE, NOT INTENDED PRIMARILY AS MEANS TO UNIFY ERITREAN MILITARY FORCES IN FIELD, BUT RATHER AS TECHNIQUE TO FORGE SOME FORM OF UNIFIED BODY TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS. AS GOE DOES NOT BELIEVE LEADERSHIP OF EVENTUALLY INDEPENDENT ERITREA AT STAKE, EGYPTIANS NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERNED WHO LEADS ERITREAN NEGOTIATORS TO CONFERENCE TABLE. PRIMARY EGYPTIAN CONCERN AT PRESENT IS THAT ALL-OUT MILITARY ASSAULT ON ERITREANS WILL INVOLVE ERITREAN BASES IN SUDAN AND, POSSIBLY, HOT-PURSUIT RAIDS ACROSS SUDANESE BORDERS INVOLVING CUBAN TROOPS. IT THEREFORE IMPERATIVE TO GET NEGOTIATIONS UNDER WAY IMMEDIATELY.

6. ERITREAN SUPPORT. REGARDLESS OF ETHIOPIAN EUPHORIA AFTER SPEEDY CONQUEST OF OGADEN, GOE DOES NOT BELIEVE MILITARY RECONQUEST OF ERITREA WOULD BE EASY. SIDQI CONCEDED THAT IRAQIS HAVE ACCEDED TO SOVIET DEMANDS TO CEASE MILITARY AID TO ERITREANS, BUT GOE CONVINCED THAT SOVIETS CANNOT STOP FLOW OF ARMS INTO ERITREA WITHOUT NAVAL BLOCKADE OF ENTIRE RED SEA COAST. ERITREANS HAVE CAPTURED MORE WEAPONS FROM EPMG FORCES THAN THEY CAN USE AND OTHER ARAB STATES WILL KEEP FLOW OF ARMS AND EQUIPMENT ALIVE. EVEN LIBYA POSSIBLY CHANGING PAST
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OPPOSITION TO ERITREAN CAUSE: QADHAFI TOLD SOMALI PRES SIAD DURING MARCH 1 TALKS IN TRIPOLI THAT LIBYA FAVORED SELF-DETERMINATION FOR ERITREANS. FACT THAT

ERITREAN INSURGENCY A TRUE "PEOPLE'S WAR"; MILITARY SELF-CONTAINED NATURE OF ERITREAN GUERRILLAS; TERRAIN; AND LONG FIELD EXPERIENCE OF INSURGENTS ALL GUARANTEE IN GOE EYES THAT ETHIOPIAN VICTORY WOULD NOT BE SPEEDY, EVEN WITH EXTENSIVE CUBAN INVOLVEMENT.

7. WHAT CAN USG DO? GOE AFRAID THAT SOVIETS, FLUSHED WITH MILITARY SUCCESS IN OGADEN, WILL UNDERESTIMATE MILITARY CAPACITY OF ERITREANS AND WILL AUTHORIZE WIDE-SPREAD EPMG MILITARY OPERATIONS WHICH WILL INEVITABLY DRAG IN SUDAN. EGYPTIANS THUS WOULD LIKE TO SEE USG INTERCEDE DIRECTLY WITH MOSCOW BEFORE IT TOO LATE. USG SHOULD IMPRESS UPON SOVIETS THAT ERITREANS TOUGH MILITARY NUT TO CRACK AND CAUTION AGAINST MILITARY ADVENTURES IN ERITREA WHICH LIKELY TO GET OUT OF CONTROL. IN ADDITION, USG SHOULD PUSH SOVIETS TO URGE ETHIOPIANS TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS. SIDQI BELIEVES U.S. WOULD BE IN STRONG POSITION RE INTERNATIONAL LEGALITY IF IT URGES RETURN TO BASIS OF UNGA RES 390, WITH MODIFICATIONS. USG WOULD ALSO BE IN STRONG POSITION IN EYES OF OAU IF WASHINGTON COULD ARGUE THAT SOVIET/CUBAN PRESENCE IN ERITREA WAS PREVENTING NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. GOE CURRENTLY FEARFUL THAT ETHIOPIANS LOSING DECISION-MAKING POWER ON ERITREA TO MOSCOW, THUS NECESSITATING DIRECT USG INTERVENTION WITH MOSCOW. EGYPTIANS FOUND IT OMINOUS THAT YUGOSLAV FONMIN MINIC, VISITING ETHIOPIA IN EARLY MARCH TO URGE SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION OF DIRECT SOVIET ROLE IN MILITARY AFFAIRS, WAS UNABLE TO SEE MENGISTU TO PUSH YUGOSLAV CASE. GOE BELIEVES THAT IT FINE FOR USG TO CONTINUE POINTING OUT HUMAN RIGHTS OF ERITREANS AND CASTIGATING

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"FOREIGN" INTERVENTION IN HORN, BUT, IN VIEW OF CONTINU-
ING ARRIVALS OF CUBAN TROOPS IN ADDIS ABABA VIA LUANDA,
USG WILL HAVE TO TAKE SOME "FORCEFUL ACTION" TO STABIL-
IZE SITUATION.

8. COMMENT: SIDQI REMARKS INDICATE THAT GOE STRUGGLING
TO COME UP WITH REALISTIC POLICY IN DETERIORATING SITUA-
TION, MUCH AS HAPPENED WITH OGADEN. EGYPTIANS APPEAR
DOUBTFUL OF USG COMMITMENT TO HELP SOLVE ERITREAN PROBLEM.
SIDQI MADE NO SUGGESTION AS TO HOW USG SHOULD "URGE"

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SOVIETS TO GET NEGOTIATIONS ON ERITREA STARTED, BUT IN-
DICATED THAT STRICTLY HORTATORY GESTURES, WITHIN
LIMITED ETHIOPIAN CONTEXT, UNLIKELY TO BE OF USE. EILTS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PROVINCE, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, DISSIDENT FACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978CAIRO09800
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780141-0958
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
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Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 ADDIS ABABA 1399
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3276022
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOE VIEW OF ERITREAN SITUATION
TAGS: PEPR, ET, SU, UR, EG
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/6f62f2c3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014